

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SAN JO 03015 242241Z

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ACTION L-03

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, EFIN, CS
SUBJECT: VESCO CALLS ON NEWSPAPER EDITOR

REF: SAN JOSE 2947

1. ROBERT VESCO APPEARED IN THE OFFICES OF THE DIARIO DE COSTA RICA ON AUGUST 22 FOR AN APPOINTMENT WITH JULIO SUNOL, THE PAPER'S DIRECTOR. ACCORDING TO SUNOL'S FRONT PAGE REPORT OF THE MEETING AND DISCUSSION, VESCO SAID HE ASKED FOR THE APPOINTMENT WITH DIARIO'S DIRECTOR BECAUSE THE PAPER'S EDITORIAL LINE HAD BEEN SO VIGOROUSLY OPPOSED TO HIS PRESENCE IN COSTA RICA. SUNOL EXPLAINED IN AN INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH THAT HE COULD NOT REFUSE TO INTERVIEW VESCO BECAUSE VESCO HAD ASKED FOR THE INTERVIEW IN THE PAPER'S OFFICES, AND NOT IN HIS OWN.

2. ACCORDING TO SUNOL'S DIGEST OF THE CONVERSATION VESCO ASKED SUNOL WHY HE WAS SO OPPOSED TO VESCO LIVING IN COSTA RICA WITH HIS FAMILY. SUNOL REPLIED THAT HE HAD NOTHING PERSONAL AGAINST VESCO, BUT HE BELIEVED VESCO IS AS A "WHALE IN A LAGOON," AND THEREFORE DANGEROUS TO COSTA RICA. HE ADDED, ACCORDING TO THE REPORT, THAT NEVER BEFORE IN THE HISTORY OF THIS COUNTRY HAS POLITICAL POWER BEEN SO DIRECTLY CONNECTED

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SAN JO 03015 242241Z

WITH FOREIGN ECONOMIC POWER AND SAID VESCO'S ASSOCIATION

WITH PRESIDENT FIGUERES IS PRIMARILY WHAT MOTIVATED THE NEWSPAPER'S CONSISTENT CAMPAIGN. SUNOL WENT ON TO SAY THAT VESCO'S CAPITAL IS SO POWERFUL THAT IT COULD HAVE POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND CAUSE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DISEQUILIBRIUM.

3. VESCO REPLIED THAT HE HAD NO INTEREST IN THE POLITICS OF THE COUNTRY AND THAT HE RESPECTED ALL POLITICAL PARTIES. HE REPORTEDLY ADDED THAT HE WAS A FRIEND OF PRESIDENT FIGUERES, BUT DID NOT SUPPORT HIM POLITICALLY.

4. IN REPLY TO SUNOL'S QUESTION ABOUT VESCO'S FRIENDSHIP WITH PRESIDENT NIXON, VESCO REPLIED THAT HE CONSIDERED HIMSELF NIXON'S FRIEND, BUT HE DOES NOT SUPPORT HIM POLITICALLY.

5. SUNOL THEN ASKED VESCO'S VIEW ABOUT THE AMERICAN EMBASSY'S EFFORT TO EXTRADITE HIM FROM COSTA RICA. SUNOL SUGGESTED, REPEATING FREQUENTLY HEARD STREET RUMORS, THAT THE GESTURE FAILED BECAUSE THE US GOVERNMENT WAS NOT REALLY INTERESTED IN HAVING VASCO IN THE US BECAUSE OF HIS POSSIBLE IMPACT ON THE WATERGATE AFFAIR. VESCO REPLIED, ACCORDING TO THE REPORT OF THE CONVERSATION, THAT HIS PRESENCE IN THE US WOULD AGGRAVATE THE WATERGATE, BUT HE ADDED "I BELIEVE THAT THE EMBASSY WAS INTERESTED IN SEEING ITS GESTURE PROSPER, BUT I THINK THERE IS ALREADY ENOUGH OF WATERGATE. THE POLITICAL ENEMIES OF PRESIDENT NIXON HAVE GONE TOO FAR AND ARE ONLY INTERESTED IN PREJUDICING HIM."

6. WITH RESPECT TO VESCO'S INVESTMENTS IN COSTA RICA, SUNOL SUGGESTED THAT THEY HAVE EXCEEDED \$100,000,000. VESCO SAID, IN REPLY, "I DON'T BELIEVE THEY ARE THAT HIGH; THERE IS NOT MUCH OPPORTUNITY IN COSTA RICA." FURTHER ON SUNOL SAID HE SUGGESTED THAT VESCO'S VISIT MIGHT BE PART OF A SERIES OF PUBLIC APPEARANCES DESIGNED TO ACCUSTOM THE COUNTRY TO HIS PRESENCE; TO WHICH VESCO REPLIED, ACCORDING TO SUNOL THAT HIS VISIT TO DIARIO WAS PROMPTED BY THE COMBATIVE TONE OF THE NEWSPAPER'S EDITORIAL LINE AND IT WAS THE ONLY ONE OF ITS KIND. VESCO THEN WAS SAID TO HAVE SUGGESTED THAT

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 SAN JO 03015 242241Z

MANY OF THE ATTACKS AGAINST HIM WERE IN REALITY ATTACKS AGAINST PRESIDENT FIGUERES.

7. ACCORDING TO THE REPORT THE CONVERSATION TERMINATED WITH VESCO'S STATEMENT THAT HE INTENDED TO REMAIN IN THE COUNTRY, ONLY WANTING HIS CHILDREN TO ATTEND SCHOOLS HERE, AND ASSURANCE THAT THEY WILL NOT BE MOLESTED. HE SAID THAT HE PLANNED TO DEPART SAN JOSE ON AUGUST 23 FOR

NASSAU WHERE HE WOULD REMAIN SOME TIME BEFORE RETURNING TO COSTA RICA. SUNOL ADDED THAT VESCO ASKED THAT DIARIO PUBLISH THE "HUMAN ASPECTS" OF THE CONVERSATION.

8. COMMENT: THIS IS THE SECOND (SEE REFTEL SAN JOSE 2947) PUBLIC APPEARANCE IN THE PAST FEW DAYS BY ROBERT VESCO, CLEARLY INTENDED TO IMPROVE HIS POOR PUBLIC IMAGE IN COSTA RICA. IT SEEMS THAT VESCO HAS TAKEN PERSONAL CHARGE OF HIS PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES WHICH PLAGUED HIM FOR THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS AND IRRITATED AN ALREADY ANTAGONISTIC COSTA RICAN PUBLIC. IT WOULD NOT BE SURPRISING IF VESCO CONTINUED SUCH PUBLIC APPEARANCES, WHILE THROUGH CAREFUL "INVESTMENTS" ATTEMPTED TO CHOKE OFF HARSH POLITICAL ATTACKS FROM THE NEWSPAPERS AND OPPOSITION POLITICIANS. INSIDERS CLOSE TO PRESIDENT FIGURES EXPECT THAT SUCH A PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGY WILL SUCCEED IN ELIMINATING OR SHARPLY AMELIORATING THE VESCO ISSUE IN THESE CRITICAL MONTHS PRECEDING THE FEBRUARY 1974 ELECTIONS. ANOTHER INDICATION THAT VESCO HAS DECIDED TO TRY TO IMPROVE HIS IMAGE HERE (AND REMAIN BASED HERE) IS HIS INTEREST IN RENEWING EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A SPECIAL EDUCATION CENTER FOR RETARDED CHILDREN IN ONE OF THE THREE ENGLISH-SPEAKING SCHOOLS.

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